DONALD JUDD

Complete writings
1975-1986

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VAN ABBEMUSEUM

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Statement

"Somewhat new work is usually described with the words that have been used to describe old work. These words have to be discarded as too particular to the earlier work or they have to be given new definitions. Occasionally new terms have to be invented. I discarded 'order' and 'structure'. Both words imply that something is formed. Material, area, volume, space or color are ordered or structured. This separation of means and structure – the world and order – is one of the main aspects of European or Western art and also of most older, reputedly civilized art. It's the sense of order of Thomist Christianity and of rationalistic philosophy which developed from it. Order underlies, overlies, is within, above, below or beyong everything.

I wanted work that didn't involve incredible assumptions about everything. I couldn't begin to think about the order of the universe or the nature of American society. I didn't want work that was general or universal in the usual sense. I didn't want it to claim too much. Obviously the means and the structure couldn't be separate and couldn't even be thought of as two things joined. Neither word meant anything.

A shape, a volume, a color, a surface is something itself. It shouldn't be concealed as part of a fairly different whole. The shapes and materials shouldn't be altered by their context. One or four boxes in a row, any single thing or such a series, is local order, just an arrangement, barely order at all. The series is mine, someone's, and clearly not some larger order. It has nothing to do with either order or disorder in general. Both are matters of fact. The series of four or six doesn't change the galvanized iron or steel or whatever the boxes are made of."

Dictionary of Contemporary Artists, London/New York 1977.

Statement

The categories of public and private mean nothing to me. The quality of a work can not be changed by the conditions of its exhibition or by the number of people seeing it. The idea of public sculpture comes from commemorative statues. The recently revived word 'monumental' is similarly obsolete.

The circular piece in Münster could just as well be on a ranch. Its requirements are simple and general: a large open space and a moderate slope.

The unusual aspect is the financing necessary to build the piece.

Skulptur, Ausstellung in Münster; Projektbereich - Katalog II, Münster 1977, p. 48.

In defense of my work

The purpose of the foundation is to preserve my work and that of others and to preserve this work in spaces I consider appropriate for it. This effort has been a concern second only to the invention of my work. And gradually the two concerns have joined and both tend toward architecture.

The installation of my work and of others is contemporary with its creation. The work is not disembodied spatially, socially, temporally, as in most museums. The space surrounding my work is crucial to it: as much thought has gone into the installation as into a piece itself. The installations in New York and Marfa are a standard for the installation of my work elsewhere. My work and that of others is often exhibited badly and always for short periods. Somewhere there has to be a place where the installation is well done and permanent. This obviously implies that museums are inadequate for their job. My installations and architecture are very much in defense of my work. Visual, spatial art cannot be reduced to performance.

My work and that of my contempories that I acquired was not made to be property. It's simply art. I want the work I have to remain that way. It is not on the market, not for sale, not subject to the ignorance of the public, not open to perversion.

I have learned a great deal by having other artists work always present. It's the only way to understand their work. Galleries and museums provide information but not a situation for comprehension. I've always needed my own work in my own space to understand it and to think of further pieces. The brief time of gallery and museum exhibitions would be ultimately fatal if it were not for the permanence of my own installations. The interrelation of the architecture of 101 Spring Street, its own and what I've invented, with the pieces installed there, has led to many of my newer, larger pieces, ones involving whole spaces. Several main ideas have come from thinking about the space and situation of that building. The fine installation of early pieces in the National Gallery of Canada was possible because of the installation of early pieces in the south room of the east building in Marfa. This installation took a great deal of thought and revision over two or three years.

Very little is left in any period with the original intentions evident. I'm trying to do this. All the paintings of the great American painters of the forties and fifties are scattered. And much damaged. David Smith's installation outdoors of his own work was destroyed by ignorant executors and the taxes of the United States Government. The United States Government and the rest of the society pride themselves on their culture while merely using art to symbolize culture and steadily and consistently destroying real art and its context. The inheritance tax of the Government is the greatest threat to my work. And the death of an artist increases the value of the art enormously. The IRS recognizes the money; the USIS recognizes the reputation; but they and few recognize the conditions necessary for creating art.

I and a few artists are the reason for the existence of numerous expensive museums of contemporary art and of the jobs of their staffs. We are the only activity that performs for nothing. Half of the retail money goes to dealers who usually conive for more. The half I get goes into my work and its installation and yet I'm taxed outrageously and arrogantly by three governments and moderately by three more. What little I can do is the reality of a gross and inflated situation. I have to defend what I've done; it is urgent and necessary to make my work last in its first condition.

December 1977, first publication.

Leo Castelli

Other than some artists, Leo Castelli is the most important person involved in art in the last twenty years, for good reasons and bad. The best reason is that it is very unusual for a person to stay with an enterprise, very hard, and not to give up or pervert the effort, and especially it is unusual to the point of being a fluke for someone in this society to maintain an enterprise with a claim to civilization. The worst reason is that Leo's importance is partly due to the absence of serious critical and museum activity, in fact to the absence of a serious public.

Leo sells art: both the necessity of that and its limit should be kept in mind. This country loves to exalt the entrepreneur and the performer above the creator, but after all, business is business. Beyond business, Leo is something of a patron, in a good sense. Artists are generally treated, and sometimes act, like unowned serfs waiting for an owner. Leo does not have this attitude; he's not patronizing. This is a major virtue. Otherwise it's impossible to be associated with a dealer: I could list a few. The patronizing attitude includes interference in the production of the art, pressure to make saleable kinds of art and suggestions as to how to live. Leo has not presumed to bother me with any of these. The sale of art is usually an artist's main contact with the society and of course it's the artist's living. It's very important then that the business be honorable; not perfect perhaps, but not disgraceful. It is a disgrace to work for nothing, to have your desire to make art used against you; it's a disgrace to be cheated, to be played with and to be patronized. Leo and I have had some difficulties but the business has remained normal and decent. Abnormality is the rule. Something about the art business attracts bosses, people who want to promote themselves to owners, up a class, merely by walking up to someone and saying 'you're mine' or advancing a little money and saying so. In no other activity can a little advance buy so much servitude. The artist however can advance work, even money in unpaid sales, and never own an art dealer. After all these years I don't own even one. The new owners can feel that they are patrons, benefactors of the arts, and still turn a buck. It's very handy. The dealers rise to gentry and the artists decline to serfs. Most of the dealers are used car salesmen. Many are shysters. I wonder why they entered such a peculiar business. Leo's a gentleman and he's interested in art.

Leo's main purpose is to keep his gallery open, for the most part with the best artists. His purpose hasn't been to put a lot of money in the bank for himself. Keeping the gallery open also means continuing the advances to the artists. This effort makes the other people supposedly interested in art look pretty bad. Certainly the artists are exploited but so is Leo and a few other serious dealers. Leo has done the work not only of the businessman but also of the critic, the curator, the collector and of those who should commission art. The lax, unhelpful attitude of these people is partly responsible for the decline in the quality of visual art over the last fifteen years. Institutional bureaucracy and a growing commercial bureaucracy are about to join to assimilate visual art as they have music, dance, theatre and architecture.

I have some complaints about Leo's gallery – too many artists, some not so good, too many painters, most overblown – but the gallery is still way above the show business of the museums and of most of the galleries of the erstwhile Cast Iron District. Leo wobbles some and tries now and then to be commercial and fashionable, but mainly he is concerned with the best work and I think very much with his position in the history of our time.

Leo has always accepted the necessity of doing new work, usually large, expensive and unsaleable. I was very impressed when, before the show I had at the Whitney in 1968, Leo borrowed $ 10,000 from the bank to construct new pieces. I think no dealer, and certainly no museum, would provide the space and most of the money to construct the large plywood piece of mine that was recently in the gallery in Green Street. For there to be serious art these things have to be done. There is always going to be serious art somewhere, as there is elsewhere music, dance, theatre and architecture, but if it to be seen among the present public of equally ignorant lolling liberals and failed conservatives, there has to be a serious person like Leo to make it visible.

Leo Castelli twenty years, New York 1977. (20th Anniversary catalogue.)

On Russian art and its relation to my work

"If we examine the painting of the first quarter of the twentieth century we immediately notice two trends: 'objective' and 'non-objective'." If we examine the painting of the first three quarters of the twentieth century we immediately notice the same thing. We also notice that non-objective, concrete, abstract art has been the live force of this period and that objective, representational, literary art has been its dependent. It's been "the actual force of red" alongside "a worker in a red apron." Of those who began the tradition of the force of red, Malevich was the most clear in his painting and writing, as was Mondrian. The Cubists were not so clear on the separation of nature and art and Picasso reneged completely. The period in Russia before and with Malevich was amazing. Tatlin, Rodchenko and Lissitzky were amazing. The revised empire and its ignorant and indifferent populace destroyed a civilization.

When I began going to art school in 1948, the school was so mediocre that it was possible to be self-educated in it. The only school that I know of now that was probably good was Black Mountain College, where Albers taught; and then later Yale University, when he went there. No one mentioned Malevich in the school that I was in and I think there were only five paintings by him in the Museum of Modern Art: one Cubist one. *Black Square and Red Square* of around 1913, two *Suprematist Compositions* with small elements and *Suprematist Composition: White on White* of 1918. I remember nothing by the other Russians, except for Gabo and Pevsner. I essentially missed the Russian work. Sometime after art school, because there were so many paintings in New York and Philadelphia, I began to admire Mondrian; also Matisse and Léger. However, as an artist, there is always the problem of trying to understand what you are interested in, what is given in yourself. I knew that I didn't understand Mondrian enough to use his work, if you should use someone's work. Also in the middle fifties I was aware of the work being done in New York and admired certain aspects of it. I didn't think that I understood it either. I realized that there was something to Pollock's work when first I saw a small painting at the Modern Museum. Nothing seemed more inaccessible as education.

Most of my difficulties with Mondrian would also have been with Malevich. The first is that geometry and non-objectivity were very alien to me, since I had painted models in art school and landscapes afterwards and semi-abstract landscapes after that; and finally loose abstractions. There were red aprons everywhere and bits and pieces of the worker. But all through this fairly miserable sequence there was pressure from the reality of color and surface. My bias against geometry prevented me from sufficiently admiring Newman's paintings soon enough, and also Reinhardt's and Albers'. I liked Stuart Davis' work very early, which certainly deserves to be liked. I was also wary of geometry because I associated it with the ideality and purity of Mondrian's work. Since I leapt into the world an empiricist, ideality was not a quality I wanted. Unfortunately the painting by Malevich that I knew best was *White on White*, which seemed somewhat ethereal. Malevich's work as a whole, and his writing, is fairly down to earth compared with Mondrian's work and writing. The ideality of Malevich is in the newness of the present, in the beginning of the future, in the start of a civilization. He believed that change could be quick and that education could have a great effect. He believed that the state and the society were the same thing and that the state could be new. He unaccountably believed that those in power would be progressive and benevolent. These ideas seem very exotic now and almost as ethereal as Mondrian's Platonism. Malevich, and also Mondrian, believed that art was art, that it was something in itself, an idea that can be just as firm, or firmer, found in an individual, in which it arises anyway, as in general idealism. But certainly Malevich didn't think that art was unrelated to all other aspects of civilization. The quarrel between himself and Tatlin shows the importance of the issue of the relation and extent of separation of art and other things visual, and also of the difference in working apart from, partly within, or within the society. Malevich wanted to maintain a more strict identity for visual art than Tatlin; his participation in the society was in teaching, writing and promoting the new system, all of which were based on his work, but as separate activities. Malevich and Tatlin had to place themselves with relevance in an existing world, a very difficult thing to do, and more so than most European artists of the time. This usually takes a wide belief, at least at first, and a wider disbelief. In a sense beliefs are real even though the objects of the belief seldom are. The deities don't exist but the beliefs were made here. 'Spiritual' art, high art, is made by those who have sufficient information to be 'spiritual,' which is no longer the case in any of the religions, or in the case of the belief in the national state. It's easy to believe or to invent something general if there's little reality to consider or reconcile.

I wrote once that Malevich painted as if he's busy, that there's a matter of fact quality to the execution. And certainly the very direct placement of the squares and bars have an empirical quality to them. The busy range of his interests – political posters, stage sets, teaching and architecture – seems fairly pragmatic. Tatlin's interest in real materials and space certainly is. I would have liked to have known of that interest in the early sixties. Even though I was taught conservatively I soon became biased against small units, as in most of Malevich's paintings and in Mondrian's last ones, a bias caused by the distant activity of Pollock, Newman and Rothko. Also the small units seemed to have a vestige of fragmentation, which I very early thought an impossible, trivial position. The difference between the scale of Malevich and Mondrian and that of Pollock, Newman and Rothko is one great divide in the art of this century. In Mondrian's work there seemed a residual of landscape painting in the indication of the bars to above and below, right and left. I admired Mondrian's composition greatly and considered it finished. In Malevich's work the suggestion of movement seemed naturalistic to me. The composition of the elements in Malevich's work is somewhat newer than that in Mondrian's, less composed in traditional sense.

Later, mostly due to Pollock, I became uneasy with the indefinite space of Mondrian's paintings, which is a worry that I would also apply to Malevich, though less so because of the pragmatic application of the paint. The white in Mondrian's paintings seems space, the bars objects. The white, if regarded as a fine texture, can seem a surface. This double function is obviously ambiguous, and is naturalistic.

Small elements and even large ones on an indefinite ground always seem like objects in space, things in the world. They are points in space and the space is an empty surround. Instead, what is needed is a created space, space made by someone, space that is formed as is a solid, the two the same, with the space and the solid defining each other. Time and space don't exist; they are made by events and positions. Time and space can be made and don't have to be found like stars in the sky or rocks on a hillside.

There is a belated interest in the Russian art of the early part of the century and in the art of the Suprematists and Constructivists and also in that of the De Stijl group. But it bothers me that this interest is so late, too late to allow them to do a lot rather than a little, and late because they're dead, and that these artists, who are very superior, are regarded as just another phenomenon to be shown. The Russians died early or lived finished. Mondrian worked hard and died poor. Until lately we had a guy who found a snow shovel and who talked for decades, producing talking artists. And recently Picasso, who produced junk for forty years, and not much before, is hailed. For my part, I've lived in the shade of a coat-hanger and a bedspread. These household goods can't be an advance on Newman and Pollock. There are very few people interested in or able to judge the quality of contemporary art. We're swamped by a large public to whom art is just phenomena. In the thirty-sixth year of the American Empire, the public is not so different from the Russian public that ignored those artists. The Central Government, though, instead of scowling like Lenin, smiles, since art makes jobs, and helping art is a cheap way to look good.

I think the quality of visual art has declined in the last fifteen years. Of course the fault is mainly that of the artists who should be able to see through the ways they are used and to defend their work. But the large number of idle users is suffocating. Visual art, through chance and through being so small, did something important from 1946 to perhaps 1966. Most other arts already had a commercial and governmental bureaucracy and by now hardly exist. Visual art seems to be following. As Lincoln Center is the example of degradation for the other arts, the new National Gallery is the example for the visual arts. It is a museum modeled on a hotel, a grand lobby surrounded by boutiques. This architecture and its function are fascist; fascist architecture of course comes from power, as does some good architecture, but even more it comes from excessive generality, to point of meaninglessness, from the use of forms that mean little or nothing to the users. Very little art and architecture mean anything now and that amount is being squashed by use and ignorant interference or is being neglected, as was the work of the nobility I've mentioned.

Art Journal 41 (Autumn 1981) 3, p. 249-250.

On installation

The installation and context for the art being done now is poor and unsuitable. The correction is a permanent installation of a good portion of the work of each of the best artists. After the work itself, my effort for some eighteen years, beginning in a loft on Nineteenth Street in New York, has been to permanently install as much work as possible, as well as to install some by other artists. The main reason for this is to be able to live with the work and think about it, and also to see the work placed as it should be. The installations provide a considered, unhurried measure by which to judge hurried installations of my own and others in unfamiliar and often unsuitable places. This effort seems obvious to me, but few artists do it, though there is a tendency to keep earlier work, and the idea of a permanent installation is nearly unknown to the public for visual art.

There are four situations in which art is seen: the collector's home, the art gallery, the public space and the museum. The collector's home should be fairly harmless but almost always the architecture is awful and the art extremely crowded. There are few collectors and even fewer persons who have only two or three things. Usually the art gallery doesn't look so bad, though trite, but it's the showroom of a business. Small portable work sells best, not large work that is nearly made in place. And the shows are temporary. Anyway, business shouldn't determine the way art is seen, although most of my work has been shown first in galleries, the best made and the best installed in Leo Castelli's three spaces. Art in a public space is a recent result of public money. At this point, art is art and is neither public nor private, so 'public art' is a misnomer. 'Public' practically, means the application of many extraneous worries to the art, which favors willing mediocrity. Some large good pieces by intractable artists have been made and they are among the public, which is desirable, but the locations are invariably appalling, leftover spaces among positive schmaltz. A bad location doesn't ruin a good work but it tends to reduce understanding to information: you know it's good but you can't stand standing there long enough to find out why. This is also true of art in some museums and of antiquities that have been overrun by industry or suburbia. These three categories, aside from the important economic activity of the gallery and a few large pieces in public, fail to produce serious results. If somewhere there were serious and permanent installations, the ephemeral exhibitions of the gallery and the awful environments of the work in public could be criticized and endured.

The gallery is fairly controllable, if limited, the public space slightly, the collector's glass ranchhouse not at all. Most owners of art install it badly; little can be expected. The museum should be serious and competent and much is expected but it's a disappointment and a failure. Ways of living, societies and grand institutions develop without much thought and so do some lesser institutions such as the museum. A museum of contemporary art, sometimes joined to a historical museum, itself debatable, has become a necessary symbol of the city and of the culture of the city all over the world. One result of the thoughtlessness of this expensive efflorescence is that no museum is able merely to physically exhibit the art of the last twenty years, barely and not well that of the last forty, and amply not that of the last hundred. Such an institution is no proof of culture.

The art museum was first the palace of a failed noble and then a bourgeois copy growing increasingly distant as the new rich grew distant from the disappearing aristocracy and as liberal functions developed, such as the obligations of the new rich to educate those they left behind. Right away it's clear that this has little to do with art. The new rich in the last century, the old rich in this, and the new rich now, are basically middle class. Unlike some of the aristocracy, and of course like many, the present rich, the trustees of the museum, do not intend to know anything about art. Only business. The solution to the problem of having culture without having to think about it is to hire somebody. The rich middle class is bureaucratic, so there's an expert for everything. The result is that there's little pleasure in art and little seriousness for anyone anywhere. A museum is the collection of an institution and it's an anthology. A few anthologies are all right, but some hundred in the United States alone is ridiculous. It's freshman English forever and never no more no literature.

Art is only an excuse for the building housing it, which is the real symbol, precise as chalk screeching on a blackboard, of the culture of the new rich. The new National Gallery is a fine example. It's the apotheosis of the public space. The main exhibition area is leftover space within the solids of a few triangles and a parallelogram, containing offices and boutiques. The power of the central government, the status of the financiers and the mediocre taste of both are dignified by art, much of it done by artists very poor most of their lives. So much money spent on architecture in the name of art, much more than goes to art, is wrong, even if the architecture were good, but it's bad.

The handling and preservation in a museum, which is expected to be careful, is often careless. Sometimes the staff seems to resent the art. Usually the view is that the damage doesn't matter and can be repaired. Even with the best intentions of a director or a curator the installation is seldom good because the rooms are not. Always of course the exhibitions are temporary. Finally, the artist lends work, accepts damage to it – insurance is a joke – gives time, and gets next to nothing: "The work is out in public." The artist should be paid for a public exhibition as everyone is for a public activity.

Some effort has been made by artists to take care of their work. Clyfford Still deserves credit for the installations of his paintings, about thirty each, at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the museums also for accepting the responsibility. Recently Henry Moore has given work to Toronto and Ruffino Tamayo has made a museum in Cuidad Mexico. There are examples in Europe of museums made after an artist's death and of enterprises such as the chapel by

Matisse. There are also Giuseppe Panza's installations of contemporary art which are meant to be permanent. In the United States there is the so called Rothko Chapel. But of all the great and very good art done in the United States in the last forty years very little can be seen. From 1946 to 1966 an exceptional amount of good art was done in New York City. A visitor now can see only two or three paintings each by Newman, Pollock, Rothko, de Kooning, Kline, Guston, Reinhardt, David and others and usually none by less inventive artists, still good, such as James Brooks, if the visitor goes to four museums, the Modern, the Whitney, the Guggenheim and the Metropolitan. And then there's a list of those who worked in the vicinity of New York and a list of younger artists. It is impossible for a visitor to acquire the knowledge of the excellence, variety and extent of the art of this period that someone has who was in New York during this time. The three museums, not the Metropolitan, may be comprehensive as anthologies but they are not comprehensive in relation to what was done. Most of the work of that twenty years has been sold out of New York, much out of the United States. The art was in no way indigenous to New York and the lack of interest of the people there is proven. That includes the museums. In the late forties and the fifties the proportion of the best contemporary art in the museums was little more than it is now, which is meager.

It's easy to imagine the magnificence of a museum in New York containing a couple of dozen paintings by Pollock or by Newman. It's too late to make such an installation for Pollock, almost for Newman. There are probably enough paintings to do so for Rothko and especially for de Kooning, who fortunately is alive. In 1966 one hundred and twenty paintings by Reinhardt were shown at the Jewish Museum for longer than usual. These probably will never be assembled again and if assembled will not be the same, since almost all have been damaged and extensively restored. In 1966 these paintings should have been hung and never moved again. Reinhardt died the next year. David Smith's sculpture should have been left in the field where he placed it. I never saw the work there and will never see so much together. And as he placed it, not as it was shown, for example, in the stupid recreation of the theater at Spoleto in the National Gallery.

A good installation is too much work and too expensive and if the artist does it, too personal, to then destroy. Paintings, sculptures and other three-dimensional work cannot withstand the constant installation and removal and shipping. The perpetual show business is beyond the museum's finances and capacities. The show business museum gets built but the art does not, nor even handled well, when the art is the reason for the building. And the architecture is well below and behind the best art. An example of something much better for less money is to have saved *Les Halles* in Paris, an important deed itself, and then to have given two hundred thousand dollars each, sufficient at the time, to a dozen of the world's best artists to make work to remain forever. This would have been the achievement of the century. Instead Beaubourg was built, an expensive, disproportionate monster, romanticizing the machinery of an oil refinery, not scarce. The building makes change the main characteristic of paintings and sculptures that don't change. The building and the change are just show business, visual comedy.

If the people of New York City should want the best art, they can finance, for far less than the cost of an apartment building producing a little more gallery space, the construction of work placed permanently by, for example, Serra, Oldenburg, Flavin, Chamberlain, Bell, Andre, or myself. We all are more or less old and reliable. There are younger artists: David Rabinowitch could do something wonderful. And there are older artists, less than the best but good, whose work if assembled, would make an installation that would outclass most museums, James Brooks for example. He is a better artist than many earlier ones 'discovered' in one of art history's several standard distances, for example, Jawlensky fifteen years ago, and Goncharova recently.

Millions are spent by the central government for and in the name of art and the same by the semi-public museums. All that money does not produce more first rate art, in fact there is less since the government became involved. And the government is too dangerous to be involved. Money will not make good art; ultimately art cannot be bought. The best artists living now are valuable and not replaceable and so the society should see that their work gets done while they're alive and that the work is protected now and later. If this society won't do this, at least it could revise some of its attitudes, laws and tax laws to make it easier for the artists to do so. Art has no legal autonomy.

I bought a building in New York in 1968, which contains my work and that of others, and two buildings in Texas in 1973, which contain my work. One building in Texas has two large rooms and the other has one. Each of the two took two years of thinking and moving pieces around. The one room took about a year. One of the two rooms was the basis for the installations in the exhibition of my work at The National Gallery of Canada in 1975, which occupies part of an office building and so has fairly plain, decent space. None of my work that's installed is lent nor is that by other artists. Permanent installations and careful maintenance are crucial to the autonomy and integrity of art to its defense, especially now when so many people want to use it for something else. Permanent installations are also important for the development of larger and more complex work. It's not so far from the time of easel painting, still the time of the museum, and the development of the new work is only in the middle of the beginning.

Documenta 7 (Kassel 1982), p. 164-167. The same text was published, under the title of "The Importance of Permanence" in *Journal: A contemporary Art Magazine (LAICA Journal)* nr. 32, vol. 4 (Spring 1982) 2, p. 18-21.

Art and Architecture

I read the following paper, now slightly improved, in the concrete auditorium of the Yale School of Art and Architecture on the twentieth of September 1983. It's a beginning to making some of my ideas communicative; as to the ideas, it's hard to know where the beginning is. Wittgenstein, who is by now too chic to quote but whom I will, said: "It is so difficult to find the beginning. Better said, it is difficult to begin at the beginning and not to try to go back further." While writing this paper I suspected, and now realize, that what I was writing about was the process of making art, rather than about first or last principles, which should come later in a more modest form than usual. The beginning and the substance of a discussion longer than this paper would be the process of making art, which I think is neglected. The aestheticians are trying to draw conclusions from the process and its results, but to me the process is first and primary and in a way is the conclusion. The philosophers are proceeding inductively backwards to a priori conclusions. I would like to go forward from the end to the beginning of the process to a posteriori conclusions. Process is the beginning but the beginning always steps backwards so that rather than simply beginning, the beginning is a search for the beginning.

It's not irrelevant that as an artist I have an edge on the analysis of the process. A practitioner can always make a philospher nervous. But after a few vague generalizations the philosopher becomes the practitioner and the edge is lost. Some of the ideas in this paper occurred to me before I began to study art and so are distinct from art and are more or less philosophical, such as the fallacy of the division between thought and feeling; some of the ideas have been confirmed in making art; some ideas are the result of making art, the result of the interaction between what is available to make a work exist and thought and feeling as one. The division between thought and feeling is part of course of the Christian one of body and soul, an itch to be elsewhere being easier to promote than scratching at home. But when my soul aches my head hurts, so I think body and soul are right here, here and now. They are not going to leave one by one, but together for nowhere.

I will consider some of the questions of art, not primarily from the outside, but as they occur in my work. An artist is certainly not without ideas and principles but these cannot be completely formulated beforehand, before the work is developed, and then simply embodied. It is an essential of art that the process of making it and the use of all that comprises it influences, suggests and enforces ideas and qualities. The ideas and qualities and the materials and techniques build each other. A red seems to have a particular quality of its own. In a work it retains that quality and yet it is altered and amplified by the context. Its original quality may have suggested the alteration. The idea or quality desired may have required the red.

I've been making art for 36 years, even more if I count a watercolor done in Omaha at eleven. By now art is a natural activity. Many thoughts and feelings have become forgotten assumptions – later I'll consider the old division between thought and feeling. It's impossible to remember the many times that red and an idea have changed precedence. I can't remember all of the particular decisions which built a type of work. It's hard to recall all of the general ideas which guided those decisions. And then much is based upon natural predilections, some understood, some partly, some mysterious. A few were present at the beginning, but I usually didn't recognize their importance. The new qualities, your own, that were not in earlier art, at first are often not considered qualities of art. This natural confusion works perfectly well for me; it's life, and I like it. But while this produces art, a form of communication itself, this doesn't produce verbal communication. Decisions made in working result in art, not in discrete ideas. Problems are solved and the solutions settle quietly into assumptions. There are guiding ideas but these also come to be very old and natural. Also they are not separate from the work and its process and so are not easily stated. The experience of someone else's work, which I'll mention later, is close to this same natural or normal state. The quality is understood first and directly and then some implications, in varying degrees.. Some are not understood at all. If the art is old, much will never be understood. The many derivative artists and architects of the moment don't know that they can't begin to understand the forms they try to revive. The experience of knowing of a viewer is real, if narrow; the experience of knowing of a user, if it occurs at all, is an illusion.

Therefore, in order to discuss what I think or what another artist thinks it is necessary to isolate and construct verbally communicative ideas. In fact, the more you can construct a philosophy the better. But this is a great effort to make for my work, and even more to make for someone else's. I've never done this. A little article on John Chamberlain's work long ago is the nearest I've come to this effort. Such a construction, along with a judgement as to quality, would be art criticism. This present lecture is a fragmentary beginning to providing a little extroverted philosophy for myself.

Everyone agrees that ultimately one essential of art is unity. After that the agreement breaks down. This fact of unity doesn't seem to say much, which is an ancient characteristic of aesthetics, the most uncertain and least developed branch of philosophy and the most ignored by those it concerns, including myself until now. Barnett Newman told Susanne Langer that aesthetics is for the artist as ornithology is for the birds. It's now a famous quip. Much of the reason for ignoring aesthetics is due to its neglect of the process of the overall development and the daily making of art. The conclusions of aesthetics are not relevant in the beginning, seldom concern the process, and say little afterwards. Also it's difficult to be informed by the extreme generalities of aesthetics when your problems are so specific. Visual art is learned primarily from other art, that of the past, more importantly the recent past and most importantly the present. For example, it's a useless platitude to tell someone that their work should be unified. If the person has any sense at all of what they're doing, their first work is unified, but at a very low level. That unity is one of similarities, of things easily joined, which produces a weak generality and next to no particularity, like a routine wash of watercolor. In fact the usual essentials of art are all platitudes and there is much art to prove that these essentials can both exist and be weak. It's more important to understand why a work is very good, especially now when quality is considered undemocratic and vague generality and trite derivation are considered thought and tolerance.

Twenty years ago I said, somewhat facetiously, that if someone said that their work was art, it was art. It's perhaps worthwhile to try to define art but it seems nearly impossible and fairly boring. Why a work of art is good, middling or bad is much more interesting. A judgement of quality is much more crucial. Many now make art and architecture, music and dance. These activities could be confined to their highest quality and everything left over relegated to not being art. But this isn't simple; much will still be called art. Certainly a lot of people make the claim. The El Paso telephone directory has a list of architects and yet there's no architecture in El Paso. Telling someone that what they claim is art isn't art gets too close to telling them, when they claim so, that they are not human beings. It's better to say that the art is bad and why. Art could be defined by the intention to make art, but that's very hazy. The ultimate reason for not being able to define art is that, for the present, everything that manages to survive from the past becomes art. If the Etruscans made it, it's art. The art of our time, a thousand years from now, will be ceramic sinks and toilets, the only plentiful and durable objects. The ancient masters will be Kohler and American Standard, the latter obviously at the heart of American values.

To begin again at the beginning in a proper philosophical manner, one person is a unity, and somehow, after the long complex process, a work of art is a similar unity. But the person is fairly unintelligible and the art is intelligible. Primarily what is intelligible is the nature of the artist, either of the past or now. The interests, thought and quality of the artist make the final total quality of the work. Incidentally, I could never consider my work as communication since I had no idea of with whom I was communicating. To consider a public at the beginning of your work is impossible, and almost later too. I made my work to be intelligible to me, with the casual assumption that if it made sense to me, it would to someone else.

A person ordinarily lives in a chaos of a great diversity of ideas and assumptions, but does function after all as one in a natural way. A person is not a model of rationality, or even of irrationality, but lives, which is a very different matter. A person lives with a little solid knowledge, a great deal of fragmentary knowledge, a lot of assumptions and many provisional solutions and reactions made from day to day. Most people have some philosophical ideas. Almost none live by one of the grand systems, only by their fossil fragments. Neither is art at the present based on a grand system. The unity in art is the same kind of natural unity and is made similarly in the realization that knowledge is very uncertain and fragmentary. But as one lives with some assertion, art can be made with a corresponding assertion and confidence. There's no other way. A person has a relationship to the natural world, more or usually less considered, to their family and friends, to the larger society, also usually little considered, and to the past, mostly unknown. All of this is unified in a work of art in a not very different way. Art is made as one lives. It must be as decisive as acts in life, hopefully more so, and is made despite the same acknowledged ignorance. But the assertions of art depend on more organization and attention than is usual in living. The force of it depends upon the long process. The construction, the development and the many decisions are necessary so that it be clear and strong.

If the unity of a work of art has the same nature as that of a person, with some of the same diversity and also incompletion and the same effort to live nonetheless, art is not a special kind of experience or knowledge or, particularly, feeling. It is special in its development and not in its essential nature. Art is generally relegated to emotion and feeling, both considered inferior to thought. At best, as in the work of Benedetto Croce, it's placed too far into feeling. He calls the making and understanding of art 'intuition', a less emotive word for him and better at the turn of the century and in Italian than it is here and now. But he also considers 'intuition' cognitive in its way, which improves the word enormously. He is concerned, as everyone is, with the crucial distinction between art and science. Certainly art is not cognitive in the same way as science, to the benefit of both.

I've always considered the distinction between thought and feeling as at the least exaggerated; this is a small description that has been raised to a central fact of human nature. I tried to find the beginning of the idea but couldn't. Probably it was developed in early Christianity. I've always blamed it on the mind and body distinction of the Christians since it's handy for mysticism and their kind of belief. All experience, large and small, involves feeling; all thought involves feeling. All feeling is based on experience which involved thought. Emotion or feeling is simply a quick summation of experience, some of which is thought, necessarily quick o that we can act quickly. It's not irrational, virtually the opposite. Thought is not strict, isolated and only logical but is continually using its backlog of experience which is called feeling. Otherwise we could never get from A to Z, barely to C, since B would have to be always rechecked. It's a short life and a little speed is necessary. If the nature of art is the same as our nature and if there is no division between thought and feeling, art is cognitive just as our experience is. And art is no more inferior than is our experience as a whole.

I've always disliked the division between form and content and have never known what to answer when asked "but what is the content?" "what does it mean?" Recently it occurred to me that this unreal and uninformative division is just part of the larger division between thought and feeling. The division between form and content neither agrees with the very reciprocal process of developing art nor the viewer's experience in looking. It also has the same absurdities as the division between thought and feeling. Both halves are meaningless and without any function when considered alone. There is no form that can be form without meaning, quality and feeling. We even have a feeling about a rock, about anything. It's a contradiction to make a form that is meaningless. It's also impossible to express a feeling without a form. It couldn't be said or seen. Embodiment is the central effort in art, the way it gets made, very much something out of nothing. Everything happens together and exists together and does not divide because of a meaningless dichotomy.

Or, if red has a quality or feeling by itself, and if later it's modified by an idea which also carries a feeling, how can it be stripped of the feelings to make pure form? How can a feeling be stripped of the red which produces it? How can and what would it be to us if the red were separated from its feeling, from the idea which modified it and that concommitant feeling? The division between form and content is not based on an understanding of art and is a falsification. It isn't even provisionally useful in discussion. It denies that art is not verbal and is still communication. The division demands a verbal kind of content which doesn't exist. This results in the claims and denials in art for all sorts of explicit obligations, notably moral and political. Some writers understandably defend form because of the perpetual demands for moral and political meaning. Most defend content. But it's a mistaken service to art to argue for pure form; it denies meaning to art. I was told once by a curator at the Guggenheim Museum, in arguing against the cancellation of an exhibition by an artist whose work was somewhat political, that it said in the charter of the museum that it could not show political art. I was offended since that meant that my work, acceptable as so-called abstraction, had no political meaning. There is work in which the visual and the literary are differently emphasized – and to me the more visual the better – but there is no pure form. And of course pure content doesn't exist. Much of philosophy is the rearrangement of what's given. Some categories such as form and content and thought and feeling seem not to be categories and elsewhere categories need to be made. The most general problem of this society, short of war and poverty, is that most activities and categories are together when they shouldn't be together and separate when they shouldn't be separate.

If you claim that art provides knowledge you risk placing it among metaphysics and religion, both destructive illusions. It is definitely not a kind of knowledge which supercedes science. Art, in its resemblance to us, is general and science is particular, although science deals with the vast world. The knowledge of science is a specific kind achieved in its own way. Just as we cannot say much about the nature of the world without going through the process of science, art cannot say much either, since, in its integrity, there is no way that it can incorporate the process of science. The only attitude in regard to science to be taken by contemporary art, is that the art should have appearances and implications which correspond to what is now known. Art cannot be ignorant. Negatively, the appearances and implications cannot violate what is known. At least art should not imply an incorrect factual statement. There's no way to know enough to make a precise true one; anyway, as I said, art cannot contain a scientific statement. Art is basically about our nature and our relationships and is only indirectly, through our ultimate relationship, that of existence, about the nature of the world. No artist through their work will ever tell you how far away Vega is. The distance of Vega affects art but art says nothing about Vega. But no scientist will ever tell you about Piero della Francesco, or that much about anyone. The distinction between scientific knowledge and artistic knowledge is very important. For 200 years or so art has been freeing itself from being obliged to say things about the world which are properly in the area of science. Some recent artists, Robert Smithson for one, have revived this dying anthropomorphism by incorporating scientific ideas and terms into their work. This is an anthropomorphic sentimentalism as gross as Landseer's dogs.

My work has the appearance it has, wrongly called 'objective' and 'impersonal', because my first and largest interest is in my relation to the natural world, all of it, all the way out. This interest includes my existence, a keen interest, the existence of everything and the space and time that is created by the existing things. Art emulates this creation or definition by also creating, on a small scale, space and time.

Just what is known in art is too large a subject to discuss here, as is my use of certain words, our 'nature' for example. Some aspects are implied in the questions discussed. The experience of coherence or unity is real knowledge. Most people need more coherence than they have, some desperately. The experience of another person is ordinarily difficult to gain and impossible if the person lived in the past. I could never have imagined someone imagining the shapes Matisse was so fond of. The experience of another time and society, which is tenuous since so little is known, can nevertheless, almost uniquely, be gained through art. The issue here is direct experience as opposed to an understanding gained from reading the work of good historians.

Proportion is very important to us, both in our minds and lives and as objectified visually, since it is thought and feeling undivided, since it is unity and harmony, easy or difficult, and often peace and quiet. Proportion is specific and identifiable in art and architecture and creates our space and time. Proportion and in fact all intelligence in art is instantly understood, at least by some. It's a myth that difficult art is difficult.

However, it's better here to consider particular questions. I only want to add that you can't exaggerate the importance of proportion. It could almost be the definition of art and architecture. Originally I ignored proportion as a subject, although I knew that good art was intuitively well-proportioned, because the subject was associated with the Renaissance and the idea that proportion is a quality of God and Nature, a reality to be deduced or intuited by Man. The Classical Golden Section was a fact of Nature just as the electron is now. This wasn't credible to me, since proportion is obviously a quality of ourselves. The Golden Section seems unnecessarily fancy, perhaps because of the perpetual academic desire for arithmetical justification, but the fact is that we can see the simplest proportions, 1 to 2, 2 to 3, 3 to 4, and guess at more.

1 to 2 is just as particular, is – not 'has' – as much its own quality, as red, or red and black, or black and white, or a material. Also there can be more than one 1 to 2 rectangle. These can comprise solids and volumes. The proportioned rectangles can make a coherent, intelligent space. They can make a credible, intelligent generality. They themselves are specific.

Art is simultaneously particular and general. This is a real dichotomy. The great thing about proportion, one aspect of art, is that it is both extremes at once. The level of quality of a work can usually be established by the extent of the polarity between its generality and particularity. Or, to state the idea a little too simply, the better the work, the more diverse its aspects. The nature of the general aspects and the particular ones changes from artist to artist and especially from time to time, since the changes are due to broad changes in philosophy. This change is the essential change in art, determining its purpose and appearance. When the change is progress it reflects the increasing scientific knowledge and the improved values in society. And when the change is not progress, it reflects increasing ignorance and a decline, as in the late Hellenistic art and the subsequent early Christian art. In fact, now, art has been declining for fifteen years, following architecture which has already sunk into musical comedy. Many artists and a majority of architects and their clients are our internal barbarians, using Toynbee's term. A good building, such as the Kimbell Museum, looks the way a Greek temple in a new colony must have looked among the huts. It looks the way the Roman temple, now a church, looks among the ordinary medieval buildings of Assisi. The temple looks like civilization. The Kimbell is civilization in the wasteland of Fort Worth and Dallas. The Seagram building is that in New York. These few good buildings are and represent advance and enlightenment in as simple a way as any survey tells you the first buildings of the Renaissance did. We are starting a new era while suffering increasing mediocrity, a time in which even the ideas of quality and knowledge are disappearing. The integrity and authority of quality and knowledge are disappearing. The integrity and authority of all the arts and of education is being destroyed by the increasing mediocrity.

Anyway, in order to explain the polarity of generality and particularity, a little history is necessary. All European art from Giotto to Cezanne has as an essential particularity the evocation of immediate emotion, what you feel right now about whoever or whatever is in front of you, about the immediate situation. This corresponds to the philosophy that you can deduce or intuit the realities of the world. If you don't believe you can do this, the complete nature of that art becomes irrelevant and wrong. Croce, incidentally, says belief is not part of art. But belief is central to art. After all, there hasn't been religious art for a long time; there isn't any Communist art; the U.S. government has no art. Grand philosophical systems and especially political ones are not credible anymore. Newman wrote "We are making it (art) out of ourselves". I believe in what I feel, know and experience and I follow the interests inherent in myself. The better artists are original and obdurate; they're the gravel in the pea soup.

In Jackson Pollock's painting the particularity, the immediacy, is the dripped paint, which remains dripped paint as a phenomenon, for all the beauty of the small shapes it makes. The generality is in the scale or proportion and in the larger shapes. It's in the appearance of chaos. The gesture or the motion shown in the application of the paint varies from painting to painting from the particular to a middling generality. The size and the color generally occur in the middle between particularity and generality. At the same time as Pollock and since, almost all first-rate art has been based on an immediate phenomenon, for example, the work of Dan Flavin and Larry Bell. The necessity for this kind of immediacy is one reason three-dimensional art has been the most advanced for twenty years. Short of that the old attitudes continue. These produce some good art but never any that's first rate. For example, DeKooning is a good artist but the difference between his work and Pollock's is vast. His brushwork is not an immediate phenomenon but is only based on a scrambled representation, not basically different from Soutine's expressionism, which is not very different from the old picture undistorted. The emphasis on phenomena and specificity relates to empiricism. This is another large topic but there isn't enough time.

This lecture has begun a slight aesthetics of my own; it's very much a beginning. There are many more questions to consider. I'll mention some. The idea of belief should be developed. Simplicity and complexity is interesting. The process of making art should be analyzed, as I said earlier. The function of 'reason' is very interesting as it estimates, understands and uses all that's known and felt, guessing sometimes, to finally help make a new kind of art. It's like a metalanguage. I remember little about John Dewey's book but have the impression that he stressed process. I need to read much more. I was recently given an English version of "Critica del Gusto" by Galvano della Volpe in which he criticizes the division between reason and feeling. I'm in the middle of Santayana's books, which I read long ago. And so on. Existence is subject. The relation of art and architecture to the past is crucial, again, especially now, when historical styles are being so outrageously debased by the architects who build unnecessary skyscrapers. The question of the past very much connects to belief and to understanding exactly what it is you know. There is the old question of function in architecture and of suitability in art. My aphorism is not that form follows function but that it never violates it. Or common sense, for that matter. And there is the relationship, which doesn't exist now, between art and architecture.

Lecture at the Department of Art and Architecture of Yale University; 20th of September 1983.

On Architecture

I've been critical of architecture from the thirties when the Joselyn Memorial was being built in Omaha to now when the AT&T building is being finished. I remember thinking that the Memorial, improbably a Roman art museum, expensively and beautifully made in white marble, in my memory, was completely irrelevant to Omaha and the Midwest. The museum conceded nothing to time, place or life. It was a conventional American idea of a conventional European idea of a Classical past that Europe never understood well. Of course Wright could have designed a real building. This eternal token is coherently made and at least follows some rules. The AT & T building follows only the rules of the New York Department of Buildings. Philip Johnson even says that the structure and shape were standard and that it was only a matter of selecting a top. The building has no style; it's like a speculator's apartment house with Modern, Colonial or Spanish plastic walnut paneling in the apartments as symbols of difference. The top is Chippendale of course; the bottom is Romanesque, Gothic, Renaissance, thirties Classic and 'Modern'. The Joselyn Memorial is a token of civilization; the AT & T building is barbarism.

Almost all building in the last fifty years is merely building, at best vernacular building, but called architecture, a pretense corresponding to the pretentiousness of the buildings. The history of this building would be similar to the stylistic history of TV sets, beginning with the imitation of the Renaissance cabinet and concluding with the copy of the imitation of the Renaissance cabinet. The history would be nearly as low and obscure. There are very few buildings built by the real architects of this century, such as Wright and van der Rohe, Le Corbusier and Kahn, the architects who constitute the history of architecture, who seem to make a brilliant and productive period. Instead the majority of buildings are either a corruption of their ideas or are untouched completely by their or anyone's intelligence, designed only by the Department of Buildings. The work of the famous architects is used to give an appearance of thoughtfulness to the architecture business. Even this appearance is being debased; it steadily becomes more thin and artificial as commercialism becomes more blatant.

Just as the buildings were unconsidered, so were the cities and countryside. Since its victory in the Second World War the United States has changed enormously for the worse. It became fat the wrong way and in the wrong places. The appearance of much of Europe shows that the change of appearance in the United States was not inevitable, that it was not caused simply by the increase in population and in the standard of living. And the United States is not only ugly but, unlike most of Europe and Japan as well, it's rundown and dirty. Three of the changes that should not have occurred are the spread of suburbia, the development of the strip cities and the redevelopment of the centers of the old cities. These changes, among the most expensive efforts of the country since the war, are destructive in every way and are also contradictory. The strip cities, very ugly, and destructive of the countryside, ruined the city centers by removing business. The city centers were then recreated by artificial economics as status symbols, which in part they were before in a better way, destroying whatever business and decent buildings that remained. The highways of the strip cities were then run backwards into the city centers. This is all bizarre and very wasteful.

Automobiles before the Second World War were much better designed than those after. The early design was based on the taste of the upper class who bought carriages and the first automobiles. This is the class who became rich in the United States from the railroad and its results. They tried to become their idea of the aristocracy of Europe. The automobiles after the second World War are fat and ostentatious, easy symbols, and reflect the taste of a new class, victorious in wartime production and successful in instituting a grand highway system and its results, superceding the railroads and the old upper class. But like the early automobiles, architecture after the war had a respectable tradition and one that was coping with the questions of industrial construction. At that point architecture was not susceptible to the present ostentation. Now it's being captured by the new upper class, the highway class, divisible into upper, middle and lower mediocre.

The skyscrapers by SOM, for instance, are not as good as the buildings by van der Rohe from which they derive, but they are sensible and pleasant buildings to have around. They make a good vernacular architecture. They're not offensive. An important consideration in regard to something as hard to make and destroy as buildings is that a style trickle down well, as van der Rohe's does in Chicago and as his and that of the Bauhaus does in northern Europe. The 'post-Modern' 'style' can't trickle down because it's trickled up from the expediency and symbols of the strip city. The myth is no longer that the primitive knows best, or the peasant, or the worker, but that the middle class knows best. (The new upper class is really middle class.) The skyscrapers – unnecessary always – of the 'Post-Modern' architects are imitations of the practices of building in the strip city, in which the structure is mass-produced and is barely variable, resulting in nearly identical buildings. Only the sign in front and the style, usually historical, of the main doorway distinghuishes the store which sells carpets from the one that makes car parts.

The fins, the statue on the radiator, the chrome and the color of the fat automobiles are signs of status to be read; the doorways of the strip city are the same; now the skyscrapers are given adventitious status by the signs of history. Everything is to be read; nothing is to be appreciated. The symbols and materials of the shopping center along the strip, which signify things better than they, but which are not actually desired, become finally the symbols and materials of the skyscrapers in the city center. Somewhere there is a real carpet and somewhere a board made of walnut, but, as with Plato's forms, they are elsewhere and that's enough. Daily life occurs on wall to wall plastic carpets within plastic walnut panelling, the daily life of everyone from the upper lower class to the upper upper class. The businessmen who made their money in the strip city in a plastic office under a mansard roof on a one-story portico attached to a store made of corrugated iron return to town and commission plastic skyscrapers with doors of ersatz history.

'Post-Modern' is nonsense since 'modern' means only modern, which is now. The term is cant since the rather small influence of the 'modern' architects is held responsible for the banality of all architecture and since then this supposedly dire influence is attacked by those who claim to want something more, often some of the same architects who debased the style of van der Rohe to the 'International Style'. This is two strawmen wrestling. An example of such cant is a remark by Wolf Von Eckardt in *Time Magazine:* "The most recent new neighborhoods, Ramot, East Talpiot and Gilo, on the outskirts, have also eschewed Bauhaus banality in favor of Jerusalem architecture. That is quite a feat in a world in which most new housing from Alaska to Zanzibar looks distressingly alike." Did the Bauhaus make A to Z look distressingly alike? Was it banal? A prominent aspect of the present is the casual distortion of the past. The good-old days or bad-old ones are used to good or bad-mouth the present without any thought as to how large or small the old events were; it's important only that the old events look big in the history books so that it seems like a large public was excited by them. In arguing for a return to religion, Daniel Bell says, as is often said, "Forty years ago, you had Stravinsky, Kandinsky, the birth of modernism. Where's the excitement in art today? And science?" Kandinsky and Stravinsky worked in a society uninterested in them, just as we work in this one. Maybe Bell doesn't know much about art and science now, or then. He can't if he's excited about religion.

For a long time and to completion now art and architecture have grown apart. The simplest reason for this is that architecture as a useful activity is thoroughly within the society, within its conventions, its institutions and their bureaucracies and is definitely in business, while art is usually peripheral to the society, made by outsiders willing to be poor. This is changing however and art is threatened by these encumbrances. Architecture for most is a profession, a career. Until lately art has been something you do if you need to do it and like to do it. There's a big difference. The division between art and architecture is a result of this difference in attitude and in position within the society. The division is an expression of the poverty of this civilization. Generally architects – not all – regard art with a certain defensive interest, as an erstwhile spouse who does better than they. Many architects ignominiously mine new and old art for ideas to paste upon their buildings by the Department of Buildings. The extent of derivation taken seriously in architecture is laughable in art.

For artists, other than the corruption of their ideas, the chief result of the separation of art and architecture is that when some art is needed it's wanted after everything is over. The artist is summoned to present a 'proposal' along with other artists, introducing a competition that some artists consider alien, for a site that the planners or architects have already determined or built. The latter avoid a viewer's elementary choice of which artist to prefer and haven't considered the art beyond the elementary problem of putting it down somewhere. The 'sculpture' was merely a symbol on the plans and suddenly it's about to occur, along with an artist. A grant or a percentage clause, even 'culture' or liberality, forces the art upon the planner, the architect, the administrators and the omnipresent businessmen, who still don't know anything about art, or architecture either, are proud of it, and still know what they like. The art is an embarassment. It's made by people they don't understand; it's not made by those who fit into a career pattern or are out to get rich fast. The art doesn't correspond to the few rules taught in grade school design. It doesn't fit into the seven deadly conventions of the society or any of the venial clichés.

1984, first publication.

Symmetry

At the most general symmetry is the rule and asymmetry is the exception. An artist or an architect can, of course, use both or use only asymmetry, but I long ago reached an agreement with what I consider the primary condition: art, for myself, and architecture for everyone, should always be symmetrical except for a good reason. The idea of a primary condition leads to scientific and philosophical questions which are relevant, although not determining, but which are too large and complex to try to understand here. These questions are not determining because the use of symmetry and asymmetry is ours, and is related only indirectly, in the nature of things, as all things are, to the world. Reasons for symmetry or asymmetry should not be made out of those aspects as they occur in the world, if in fact there the distinction even holds. The primacy of symmetry in art and architecture is not very definitive or restrictive because there are so many kinds, some very close to asymmetry, such as some of the numerical progressions that I use. Absolute symmetry is marvelous and it's also marvelous when symmetry itself allows variation, when the logic of the situation causes or allows an approach to symmetry. For example, the position to the rear of an apse doesn't seem as asymmetrical because it can only be there or to the front. The absent position is present by implication.

If asymmetry is an exception its occurrence is to be questioned more than that of symmetry. Often, especially now when so much architecture is merely zig-zags and protuberances, asymmetry indicates the absence of a reason. A good reason in both art and architecture is the configuration of the land that the structures are on. Existing buildings are a reason. In buildings function can be a reason if the requirement is real and not petty. In the United States the present time is becoming characterized by the falsification of everything public, everything visible, and even function, as hard a fact as it seems, is being perverted to decorative and bureaucratic uses. Last year two city planners in Providence, Rhode Island, having planned for three years a meaningless plaza, told a friend and me that the little undulations in the curb of the long central mall were places to park two or three cars. When we objected that the resulting shape was banal and that its purpose was trivial, we were accused of ignoring function. But there was plenty of space elsewhere to park cars, not an ultimate problem anyway. The real purpose of the 'functional' undulations is to be decorative, is to be 'creative', is to do something, anything, to the long dead rectangle that the two planners have made of a row of nineteenth century circles. This is the symmetry of a lump made asymmetrical by poking a finger in it.

In the fifties, my paintings were at first semi-abstract and then abstract, at first somewhat geometric in my version of the type established by, among others, Leger and Stuart Davis. Later they were 'abstract expressionist', in a way influenced by Pollock, whose paintings, though, are not all expressionist in the usual sense. The partial geometry, with flat even areas, suited me, and expressionism did not, but the geometry, related as it was to the space of traditional European painting, was too old and irrelevant in meaning. Pollock's work provided a way to emphasize the surface of the paint and of the whole painting. In its 'overall' nature there was little traditional European composition, which is definitely asymmetrical in a specific way. At this point I had seen but hardly understood Newman's paintings, which ultimately are much more my way of thinking. My version of expressionism was far less radical than Pollock's and so continued suggestions of the old immediacy, that of immediate feeling, of the European tradition. In leaving this the surfaces of my paintings became plain, even and brightly colored. Strokes and touches became lines, at first organic, then curved and later straight. This change divided a painting into two parts, the large, broad rectangle and the narrow lines. Once the lines became straight, the problem of where to place them became more serious. The distinction between symmetry and asymmetry arose. What did the terms mean? Was a choice necessary? There seemed to be no reason for asymmetry. I began centering groups of lines of the broad rectangle, slightly high on the canvas to counter the effect of the true center seeming low. Later in some reliefs single elements were centered. In one relief, done at the time of the paintings, the vertical rectangle is divided into quarters, each brown, by a recessed cross painted cadmium red light. Quartering is symmetrical and practical and in the last five years I've used it for gates, doors and windows. In the first threedimensional pieces in 1962 the elements, now less discrete due to being three-dimensional, were all centered. In a work placed on the floor, made in 1963, a trough cut in the upward surface is very carefuly placed on no particular division at all, which is not so easy. Later I placed elements on the half-way point of a work or a wall, or on the points which divide those into thirds, fourths or fifths.

When the exclusive use of symmetry became probable, I worried that it would be very restrictive and also that the unity I considered necessary in a work would become a trap allowing little variation. This was a pretty unnecessary worry, but it resulted in the horizontal pieces on the wall, based on extruded aluminum tubes, that used numerical progressions. There is variation visually but the spaces and solids, really volumes, underneath and behind the tubes, are arithmetically ordered, so that there is no old composition. In one kind of work the volumes double in length in one direction and the spaces between double in the other. In another, the volumes and spaces are related in an inverse natural number series, 1–1/2+1/3–1/4+1/5–1/6∞. There is also a piece based on the Fibonacci series. The inverse natural number series looks symmetrical, since the variation is so regular.

After the piece on the floor cut by a trough all of my work has been symmetrical, clearly so. It is not asymmetry to recess the top of a rectangular work sitting on the floor or to place a sheet of metal evenly to one side in a work that is primarily a tube. This placement has an implied symmetry like the apse at the far end.

A complete discussion of symmetry requires more time. These are some further subjects. Four things placed in a row, a small and local order, is symmetrical, but are five things in a row symmetrical? If the proportion of two sides of a rectangle is 1 : 2 it is symmetrical, but if the proportion is 2 : 3 or 3 : 5 is it symmetrical? And what forms can a proportional element take? Most concentric arrangements are symmetrical: a wall around a house, or two walls, or a house around a courtyard. What are the possibilities and how can variation occur? Certainly in relation to the land. In architecture all aspects have to be considered in regard to symmetry. To me, just realigning the doors and windows, if possible, of old buildings so as to be opposite one another or on an axis, is a great improvement. Other than function, there's no reason why doors and windows should be haphazard. Those of Ronchamp are instant history, the pop of a slow occurrence, which is contradiction, and so are folksy, as the Swiss source is not. Small buildings should be symmetrical and the plan for an area of a city should be so as well. Buildings in a city should also be symmetrical from top to bottom, on the street and on the skyline, and not snaggle-toothed like New York.

1985, first publication.

Marfa, Texas

I have a complex on a city block in Marfa, Texas, because I wanted to be in the Southwest of the United States and be near Mexico and also to have room for large permanent installations of my work as well as room to install work by other artists. The idea of large permanent installations, which I consider my idea, began in a loft on 19th Street in New York and developed in a building I purchased in the city in 1968.

I lived in Dalles for two years as a child and knew, as everyone did, that the West, which is the Southwest there, began beyond Fort Worth. The land was pretty empty, defined only by the names in the stories about Texas by J. Frank Dobie, as the names in the Icelandic sagas substitute in that country for the monuments that don't exist.

In late 1946 I and four other soldiers went by bus from Fort McClellan, Alabama, to Los Angeles, where we inveigled a ride from the Army Air Force to San Francisco in order to be shipped to Korea to pester the world. This was the first time that I saw the Southwest, unfortunately according to the days and nights of the bus. Since everyone knows that nothing is accidental and that everything is fully planned, it's not surprising that I sent a telegram saying: DEAR MOM VAN HORN TEXAS. 1260 POPULATION. NICE TOWN BEAUTIFUL COUNTRY MOUNTAINS-LOVE DON 1946 DEC 17 PM 5 45.

This part of the Southwest, except for El Paso and Las Cruces – where the bus stop was a shack enclosing a gum machine – has not changed much since then. But then Tucson was a town and Phoenix a nice small city. We spent the night in Phoenix and went riding at sundown not far from downtown.

In August 1963 I traveled three days on a Greyhound bus, I believe for 25 dollars, from the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York to the bus station in Tucson to visit my sister, who lived there, and my parents, who were spending the summer. The main event, even the only one, on this trip was that the first night at three o'clock somewhere in Pennsylvania a man came aboard and collected my pillow and charged me fifty cents for another. I loved the land around Tucson, chiefly because you could see it. In regard to vegetation temperate means immoderate.

During the summer of 1968 we drove from Colorado through Arizona, Utah, and New Mexico. I was looking for a place, but one not much more than a campsite. The next summer we drove down the gulf coast of Baja California, which is excessively perfect in its lack of vegetation, inland at Bahía San Luis Gonzaga the Pacific. The road was so wonderful that a day of driving eight hours resulted in eighty miles. Having come across water, beer, and food we stayed a month in El Rosario with Anita and Heraclio Espinoza, whose place was famous as a base camp for botanists and paleontologists. Each of the two following summers we stayed a month in El Rosario and a month camped out fifty miles inland on Rancho El Metate, a Spanish grant to the Espinozas. The campsite was among palms on an arroyo with a pool near a very low mound, which had been the mission of San Juan de Dios de las Llagas, founded by Junípero Serra limping north to begin San Diego and Los Angeles.

In 1970, in relation to a slight slope to the arroyo, I worked out a large piece for the land of Joseph Pulitzer in St. Louis. It's a rectangle of two concentric walls of stainless steel, the outer one level and the inner one parallel to the slope of the land. Since this is related to the land on which it is placed it is a reasonable asymmetry. A month of camping in the sun leads to the idea of a small house. I made sketches of two possibilities for Arroyo Grande, several miles away, and had thought of one for Rancho El Porvenir, a valley like a blade near El Rosario. The latter was to have been triangular to fit the valley, and to have had concentric adobe walls. It's a precedent for the complex in West Texas. But once the idea of a house grew beyond a shelter to include some art, being in Mexico became impossible since it would be hard to get the work into the country and impossible to get it out again. Also I had an argument about long hair with the Mexican officials at the border in Tijuana. Nixon had recently met with Echeverría. I suspect that he asked Mexico to help keep the hippies home, something he could not legally do from his side.

Each year on the way to Baja I drove through different parts of Arizona and New Mexico. Southern Arizona was becoming crowded and I thought New Mexico too high and cold. Looking at maps, I saw and remembered that Southwest Texas wasn't crowded. I flew to El Paso in November 1971, and drove to the area of the Big Bend of the Rio Grande in the Trans-Pecos.

In addition to my developing idea of installations and my need for a place in the Southwest, both due in part to the harsh and glib situation within art in New York and to the unpleasantness of the city, I had set a deadline for finding a place. Bill Agee, then director of the Pasadena Art Museum, where I had an exhibition in 1971, had agreed to ship a large piece the museum had borrowed anywhere in the Southwest within a year. Also the new and old pottery I had bought in the Southwest was spalling in the humidity of New York, and the cacti I had collected were dying.

The area of West Texas was fine, mostly high rangeland dropping to desert along the river, with mountains over the edge in every direction. There were few people and the land was undamaged. Since then there has been considerable careless development near the Big Bend National Park, which became the cause of the destruction of some land around it. This is the fault of Brewster County, which could have controlled the situation. I saw a lot in the middle of nowhere bulldozed bare of all rocks and desert vegetation to provide a yard for a house suburbanly designed and placed.

I chose the town of Marfa (pop. 2,466) because it was the best-looking and most practical, and rented a small house, thanks to the help of Mae Adams, now Firstbrook, who worked at the motel. Three months later, a friend, I, and my son, who was soon to eat his fourth birthday cake lost with his elders in Baja, drove a truck full of art to Texas and unloaded it into the house and garage. During this time I rented the east building on the city block in which to store the large piece.

We spent the summer of 1972 in the little house. In 1973 I bought the east and west buildings, World War I airplane hangars on the edge of town that had been moved into town in the thirties by the prescient Army to make Fort D. A. Russell, later partly a prison for captured Germans. A sign in one of the artillery sheds reads: DEN KOPF BENUTZEN IST BESSER ALS IHN VERLIEREN.* In 1974 I bought the remaining quarter of the block. (Also I went to Australia, where perhaps I should have gone in the first place.)

The buildings were not habitable. We lived in an even smaller house on the edge of town but one with a view of fifty miles around. Toward the end of our stay in this house I built a room across the side with the greatest view. The outside wall, with a door flanked by windows, became an inside wall, with the door and windows as openings. The inside of this new inside wall was the same as the other side. If you looked back after going through the door you could see where you had gone to. This was an accidental, recognized, and encouraged reference to San Sebastiano in Mantua by Alberti, the only time I've referred to anything, a practice I consider unnecessary at best by those alien to a time or a place.

The buildings and the land in town were in bad shape. I concentrated on the east building and began to install work there in 1974. The installation of the south room took about a year and was the basis for the room of old pieces in the exhibition I had in 1975 at the National Gallery of Canada.

The city block is between the main highway – U.S. 90 to 'back East' – and the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks and, unhappily, next to a cattlefeed mill. Following the ideas for El Porvenir and the circumstances I began to build a nine-foot wall of adobes around the block. The side along the highway was a the most important to close. It was built out of old adobes from Marfa, the lower part from the Toltec Motel and the upper from the Virginia Hotel, one of the buildings that began with the town, 1883 or '86 – the date is in dispute. This building was torn down by its absentee owners and the lot is still vacant. As in most American cities and towns, there is little concern for old buildings. In Russia the past is fully remembered and in the United States it is fully forgotten.

By 1976 there were a bedroom and a kitchen in the east building and the installation of the north room was complete. Since then the west building has been completed, a studio first and then an installation in the large south room. The narrow room in the middle is the library. All of the installed work is mine, so-called 'early.' I haven't gotten to the recent work or to that by other artists, all of which is still in storage. It's a lot easier to make art than to finance and make the space that houses it.

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* It is better to use your head than lose it.

In 1979, in accordance with my idea of permanent installations, I agreed to have the Dia Foundation come to Marfa and purchase the land and main buildings of Fort Russell, on the edge of town, to make permanently maintained public installations of contemporary art. My idea was to have large, careful installations of my own work, pieces made for the place, and smaller, but still large, installations of the work of Dan Flavin, also to be made for the site, and the work of John Chamberlain. Later it was planned that the complete prints of Barnett Newman would be permanently shown. I didn't want to make a comprehensive collection of contemporary art or even of the artists whose work I liked, imitating the museums. I had in mind, though, originally, one piece each outside by Carl Andre, Richard Serra, Claes Oldenburg, and Richard Long, and inside, the two very dark rooms that Larry Bell constructed in his studio in Venice, California, and in The Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1969.

Within the city block, in addition to the two large buildings, there is a smaller two-story building, the office of the Quartermaster Corps, with two children's rooms and the necessary domesticity. I've built two small adobe buildings nearby, symmetrically placed, one a bath and the other an office. There is a large vegetable garden. Next to it there is a structure, part green/dog/chicken house. Next to the children's buildings is a pergola and a pool, both built by Celedonio Mediano, who has built everything. His brother, Alfredo Mediano, takes care of the art, a serious matter not sufficiently so regarded by those reputedly interested in art. On the other side of the building, in line with my daughter's room, is an alley of green grass and seven plum trees with purple leaves. She wanted a yard. The rest of the block is covered with slightly rosy gravel from nearby. There are to be two more fair-sized buildings, east and west, for paintings (mine and others), and, to the north, a complex of four small adobe buildings centered around a pond.

Between the two large buildings on the south side is being built an inner wall that slopes slightly with the land there. The rest of the area is level, as is the outer wall. The two walls and two areas, one sloped and the other level, make a work, I suppose both art and architecture, although usually the distinction is important. The inner wall is twelve feet in from the buildings, the module throughout. The adobes are now made on the site. The discrepancy of the walls is related to the idea developed in Baja for the piece in St. Louis.

In the summer there are twelve cottonwoods around the pool, which in the winter become an elevated thicket. There is also a courtyard with a small garden of plants that stay green all year. The winter is bleak. This place is primarily for the installation of art, necessarily for whatever architecture of my own that can be included in an existing situation, for work, and altogether for my idea of living.

As I said, the main purpose of the place in Marfa is the serious and permanent installation of art. I insist on this because nothing existing now, despite the growth of activity in museums and so-called 'public art,' is sufficiently close to the interests of the best art. Museums are at best anthologies and 'public art' is always adventitious. But I also insist because the idea of permanent installations is in turn becoming debased. If it is, it's the end of a serious effort beyond the making of paintings and objects in my lifetime.

Due to the prior existence of the buildings my interest here in architecture is secondary. If I could start over the two interests would be congruent. But I've carefully tried to incorporate the existing buildings into a complete complex. They are not changed, only cleaned up. Whatever nice but rudimentary ideas that were there, such as the clerestory, are taken to completion. It's very important that all the structures work together, be 'meek and bold' among themselves. The old buildings should not drag down the new or the new denigrate the old. The conflicts you see everywhere between old and new are avoidable.

Marfa is made mostly of adobes but the town had forgotten that when I started using them. It was the obvious material. Sixty miles away in Mexico they still made adobe buildings. I've employed two men continuously for years, always legally, which is the only solution to the so-called 'wetback' problem. The wall and the small buildings are not hokey imitations of New Mexican pueblo architecture or, I think, associative in any way. Dirt is the material available on the spot, a movable spot, like God's Little Acre, that will eventually end up as the pond. The work is done according to the capacities and interests of the people who live in the area. What is possible to do is perhaps second to what exists in the scale of ultimates.

The walled enclosure is against the belated strip city, still growing decades after the fashion. It's against the idea of the suburban house on its lawn, particularly in the Southwest, where water is scarce and the weather requires enclosures. The place is related to the buildings built to the line of the street around courtyards in dry regions everywhere and especially in Chichimeca, as the Aztecs called the north of Mexico and the Southwest of the Estados Unidos. Symmetry is important; there are no 'creative' or irrelevant odds and ends sticking out. A departure from symmetry has to have a good reason. The enclosure is not pretentious, as even the best recent architecture is. Some artists are aware of the problem of false importance and true pretentiousness and resist it; architects cultivate this appearance. Proportion and scale are very important. In contrast to the prevailing regurgitated art and architecture, I think I'm working directly toward something new in both.

House and Garden, April 1985.

Art and Architecture

Some of this lecture is written for the purpose and some is from work already written or published. One problem with a lecture, mentioned by Gertrude Stein, is that the speaker tends to get bored and listen to the speaker, so I'm going to read some, change the slides and comment, read some more and comment. Perhaps you will ask questions later. Another problem is that the circumstances of art and architecture is such a broad topic that I can only consider fragments anyway. The nature of this lecture series is such that I could discuss what constitutes a good work of art, but this is a difficult philosophical matter. At the present there are quite a few good artists and a few architects who have some idea of this so that I don't think it's the primary public issue of art and architecture. Basically we know how to do these things well. The primary public issue is that the public won't let us use what we know. Hardly anyone of the public will acknowledge the autonomy and authority of the two fields. Their greater danger is to be used and assimilated.

Until the last ten years artists, not architects, were outsiders in relation to the American society. It was possible to make portable things and sell them at a distance. Now there is more interest in art, many institutions, and a desire on the part of artists to make large works and some possibility to do so. But the minute any sum of money or a need for organization is involved, the artist and even more the architect meet a committee full of all considerations except those of good art and architecture and any possibility of excellence is cancelled. Therefore the conclusion is that the public knows very little about art and architecture, including not knowing that it knows little, and even worse ultimately does not respect the knowledge of the practitioners. And, as in politics, the less known the stronger the opinion. And in both cases the knowledgeable person is resented; that person disturbs the peace of thoughtlessness.

The artists and architects are obligated by the definition of themselves to protect the excellence and integrity of their work. They cannot conform to a bottomless conformity. The United States is profoundly conformist. Europe is a garden of diverse delights, although unified some by industrialization. Even the industrial design varies. In the Soviet Union conformity has been applied, here it's been freely acquired. I'm not so sure ancient Egypt and China changed as slowly as the European historians described them, but if they did I've gained some understanding of this by living in the United States for so long. The country is not conservative but it is merely conformist; change is superficial and stasis is fundamental.

The artists and architects have an authority in what they do, but this is not authority as power. In fact it's the public which is trying to exert actual power over them. Oscar Wilde said "Art should never try to be popular; the public should try to make itself artistic." The public has to make an effort to learn and to stick to the reasons for the two activities. Almost all interest at the moment is in the use of the two fields so that every action is indirect, everything is about something else, even admiration.

It is late to say so but it still isn't sufficiently acknowledged that all societies are changing from agricultural to industrial ones, with much greater populations. This is what all the uproar is about. This causes the poor education, the complex and ambiguous industrial systems and wars. It's still a new era and art and architecture have to deal with it. They can't look backward, especially ignorantly backward. Bertrand Russell said in 1923, "We concluded, as some writers in Germany and Czechoslovakia have also concluded, that the important fact of the present time is not the struggle between capitalism and socialism, but the struggle between industrial civilization and humanity."

A young artist said to me the other day, having spent the year in Rome, that there was little contemporary art there, which I knew, and that everyone was satisfied with the past. She said though, "even Michelangelo was young once." She interpreted her and our brief lives as a reason for doing something new now and not as a reason for subsidence into eternity. She said this is our time, which seems obvious. This is the only time which is going to be our time. These are obvious points lost on everyone.

Art is relatively new in the United States but it is already being abused and threatened. Until recently it has mainly been done by those who consider themselves outsiders to the society. These outsiders are being drawn in now. This is the big change and the big problem of the last ten years. Good art may not survive even a limited incorporation.

These are some of the problems of contemporary art and architecture. In addition, oppressing these activities and every person, undercutting every purpose and hope is the forty year threat of nuclear war. I grew to the age of cannon fodder during World War II, just barely missing it and the Korean War, and like everyone else, have lived in the Cold War ever since. This War is ignorant and fanatical and irrelevant to the real interests of the United States. Recently there was an article in the New York Times by Thomas L. Friedman reasonably condemning the fanatic terrorists in Beirut. I want to add that endangering a billion people for forty years on such specious arguments as those for nuclear bombs is caused by a greater form of fanaticism. It's also bound to create a context of violence for the lesser form. Both Reagan and Mondale said that the bombs make them feel secure. But not me, either for myself, my work or my children.

The Russians are expansionists; the Americans are expansionists. During a polite and free argument with a guide in Leningrad I was trying to criticize the United States, while not absolving the Soviet Union, as she was inclined to do, although not completely. I later figured out that the best way to state the case is to say that what each nation says about the other is true. They have great faults but neither country really wants war. The Americans can't imagine it and the Russians know it too well and too recently. But a great preparation for war has usually produced war.

F. D. Roosevelt said in 1940: "And while I am talking to you mothers and fathers, I give you one more assurance. I have said this before, but I shall say it again and again and again. Your boys are not going to be sent into any foreign wars. They are going into training to form a force so strong that, by its very existence, it will keep the threat of war away from our shores. The purpose of our own defense is defense."

Both countries became the empires they fought in World War II. To maintain this dying idea they are ruining their economy and impoverishing their people. This false economy of empire and war is the second threat to everyone in this country and in the Soviet Union.

Part of a lecture at the Denver Art Museum, 1985.